A RAND NOTE

SOVIET CENTRAL ASIAN SOLDIERS IN AFGHANISTAN

S. Enders Wimbush
Alex Alexiev

January 1981

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PREFACE

This study is one of a planned series addressing the importance of the ethnic factor in the Soviet armed forces. The parent project, "The Implications of Demographic Change for Soviet Defense Policies," was directed by S. Enders Wimbush. Publications under the project to date include The Ethnic Factor in the Soviet Armed Forces: Preliminary Findings, by S. Enders Wimbush and Alex Alexiev, N-1486/1, April 1980, and Managing the Ethnic Factor in the Russian and Soviet Armed Forces: An Historic Overview, by Dmitry Ponomareff and Susan Curran, R-2640/1 (forthcoming). Planned publications include a study of current demographic trends in the USSR with a projection of the numbers of draft-eligible males by nationality to 1995, and one or more studies dealing with the options available to Soviet military manpower planners for future manpower use in conditions of rapid demographic change.

The present Note draws upon ongoing research to examine the circumstances surrounding the appearance and use of Soviet Central Asian soldiers in Afghanistan during and following the Soviet invasion of that country in December 1979. Information for the analysis derives exclusively from interviews with former Soviet servicemen who were asked about territorial, functional, and operational aspects of stationing policies and practices for non-Russian servicemen in the Soviet armed forces, and from personal reports to the authors from eyewitnesses to the Soviet invasion.

The authors intend this study to be useful to intelligence and manpower analysts generally, especially those interested in Soviet military

manpower capabilities and practices, and to military analysts concerned with specific aspects of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

SUMMARY

Published reports about the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 paint a confusing picture regarding the presence and function of Soviet Central Asian soldiers in the invasion force. For the most part, these reports suggest that Soviet political and military leaders have broken with historical precedent by using soldiers from minority groups who are ethnically, culturally, religiously, and linguistically similar to the populations being invaded.

Based on extensive in-depth interviews with former Soviet servicemen of different nationalities, this study concentrates on current territorial, unit, and functional stationing policies and practices, and on weapons and unit training procedures for Central Asians in the Soviet armed forces to challenge this assumption. It concludes that, indeed, many Soviet Central Asians are likely to have served in Afghanistan but in non-combat roles, and that, with few exceptions, these troops probably were never intended to engage the Afghan rebels except incidentally. The great majority were assigned to construction, support, and occupation units that were highly visible to foreign correspondents and diplomats, who may have been unable to distinguish between combat and construction troops and between soldiers of different nationalities who are racially similar.

In addition, we believe that some of the Soviet Central Asian soldiers in Afghanistan belong to Soviet Internal Security Forces (MVD) and to special airborne units which, according to our research, can contain Central Asians.

While Central Asian troops probably were not intended to engage in combat with the Afghan rebels, Soviet leaders may have believed that the ethnic affinities between Soviet Central Asian troops and the Afghan populations would blunt the political impact of the violent invasion. This public relations effort appears to have failed; Soviet Central Asian troops reportedly engaged in widespread fraternization with the Afghan peoples. Primarily for this reason, Central Asians were replaced by Slavic troops beginning in late February 1980, although a few still remain in Afghanistan.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the ethnic factor has figured prominently, often decisively, in the causes and conduct of warfare. Even a casual glance at the past and present battlefields of the world is sufficient to demonstrate this theorem and to suggest future conflicts. For large multinational empires, ethnic diversity occasionally has been an asset to military operations, but even more often it has been a liability. For example, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which for decades relied upon a well-orchestrated multinational army to maintain the ethnic fabric--and, hence, the unity--of the state, like the Ottomon Empire ultimately collapsed from ethnic pressures. So, too, the Soviet empire can reckon its multinationalism as a distinct liability during military conflict, as was the case during World War II when thousands of non-Russians, including more than 250,000 Central Asians and Caucasians organized in Hitler's "East Legions," deserted the Soviet state to fight for Germany.

In terms of conducting military activities across their borders, Soviet leaders continue to face an unusually vexing ethnic dilemma. Soviet borders often split ethnic groups--in some locations, such as in Central Asia, all the way to the tribal level. For the most part, non-Russian border populations share ethnic, cultural, religious, and historical ties with kinsmen immediately across the Soviet border. Many of these Soviet border populations are of substantial size and possess a well-developed national identity.

For example, there are more than 1 million Poles who inhabit the Soviet side of the USSR-Poland border. Similarly, Soviet territories

adjacent to Romania are inhabited almost exclusively by Moldavians (approximately 3 million), who are ethnic Romanians. In the Caucasus, the Soviet-Iranian border splits nearly in half an Azeri Turk population of approximately 10 to 11 million. The Sino-Soviet border divides 6.5 million Soviet Kazakhs and more than 200,000 Uighurs from 800,000 Kazakhs and 5.5 million Uighurs on the Chinese side.

As noted above, this problem adheres to nearly every stretch of the inhabited Soviet border, and it is especially pronounced between the USSR and Afghanistan, the subject of this study. Afghanistan shares a number of ethnic groups with the USSR, including Uzbeks, Tadzhiks, and Turkmen who are clustered in ethnic communities along the Afghan side of the border. The Soviet side of the border is inhabited mostly by Tadzhiks, but because the Soviet invasion was staged and is sustained from several points in Soviet Central Asia, other ethnic groups related to those in Afghanistan become a factor.

In theory, Soviet leaders would face fewer ethnic difficulties when conducting military operations across borders if Soviet non-Russian border populations were to remain unconcerned in the face of Soviet aggression against co-ethnics. An even better situation, in Soviet eyes, would be if these same Soviet non-Russian border populations were committed wholeheartedly to the Soviet interventionist policy and were to participate as part of an integrated invasion force. Whether or not Soviet leaders have seriously attempted to capture this ideal, they consistently claim so in voluminous propaganda on the subject.

The invasion of Afghanistan offers us a unique opportunity to test this hypothesis, for it now is widely acknowledged that Soviet Central

Asians[1] participated in the invasion. We have set before ourselves the task of characterizing this participation, paying particular attention to historic precedents and current Soviet policies and practices aimed at non-Russians in the Soviet armed forces.

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[1] For the purposes of this study, the term "Central Asian" is meant to include the major groups of Soviet Central Asia (Uzbeks, Tadzhiks, Turkmen, and Kirghiz) and Kazakhs from Kazakhstan. The term "Slav" is meant to include the major Slavic groups of the USSR (Great Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians), with the exception of the Western Ukrainians, who, our research indicates, are subjected to the same kinds of prohibitions and restrictions in military service as Soviet Asian minorities.

II. SOVIET CENTRAL ASIAN SOLDIERS IN AFGHANISTAN

Despite confusion and contradiction (noted below) in the reports of journalists and travelers who witnessed the opening rounds of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, evidence now is ample to show that the initial Soviet invasion force contained a significant number of Soviet Central Asian soldiers. The use of Soviet non-Russian soldiers in situations where these soldiers have ethnic, linguistic, cultural, or religious ties to the population under attack apparently is a departure from established Soviet political-military practice. Soviet authorities seldom if ever have used non-Russian soldiers to project Soviet power and influence in situations where the natural rapport between non-Russian soldiers and local populations was likely.

Sizable concentrations of Soviet Central Asian soldiers in Afghanistan suggest that Soviet leaders may view Soviet minority nationalities as a new weapon in the Soviet military arsenal, a weapon which is all the more difficult to combat because essentially it is a political weapon. If so, the use of Soviet Central Asians in Afghanistan could set a precedent for the use of other Soviet non-Russian nationalities in actions against other foreign populations who are ethnically similar; for example, the use of Moldavians in Rumania, Azeri Turks and Turkmen in Iran, Uighurs and Kazakhs in China, and others. Presumably, in the view of Soviet political and military leaders, such affinities as those of Soviet Central Asian soldiers to various parts of the Afghan population could dramatize the common bonds of the invader and his victim, thereby reducing opposition to a rapid and total Soviet takeover.

If this presumption is true, the importance of this departure from established practice should not be underestimated. Prior to recent thrusts into Afghanistan, Soviet practice regarding the use of Soviet non-Russians as pointmen for projecting Soviet power or as surrogates for Russian soldiers largely eschewed this option for other than symbolic reasons, such as stationing non-Russians in Soviet embassies and other highly visible assignments to give credibility to the notion of equality among Soviet nations and "friendship of peoples." This practice dates from the inception of Soviet power in 1917. At that time, Lenin and his Bolsheviks routinely opposed demands by dynamic Soviet Muslim leaders--who were professed Marxists and revolutionaries--to take advantage of the inherent similarities of Soviet Muslims and the populations of Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and western China to form a "springboard for revolution" in the East. Thus, Soviet Azeri Turks were prohibited from carrying the revolution to Iranian Azerbaidzhan, as were Uzbeks and Tadzhiks into Afghanistan and Kazakhs into Xinjiang. Soviet non-Russians and especially the Soviet Turkic-Muslim peoples were purposely kept at home for reasons the Bolshevik leadership never bothered to explain.[1]

Similarly, during World War II most of the Turkic-Muslim soldiers mobilized during the defensive beginnings of the fight against Germany were removed or not replaced from the front line once the Soviet army

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[1] This policy is described in detail in Chapter 3 of Alexandre A. Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

assumed the offensive. This and the deportation of entire peoples from the North Caucasus to Siberia and to Central Asia (allegedly for collaborating with the Germans) suggest that the Kremlin doubted the loyalty of these peoples,[2] a view that was strengthened by the defection of several hundred thousand Soviet Muslims to the Germans. The abolition of national military units of soldiers made up almost exclusively of Soviet minority people in the 1950s underlines these doubts.

Little evidence has been found to indicate that Soviet authorities have attempted to use their minorities to further Soviet political or military aims across borders in situations where such use would appear to be advantageous. For example, Soviet Azeri Turks were not used in any systematic fashion--and some specialists believe that they were not used at all--to further Soviet goals in Iranian Azerbaidzhan in late 1946 when Soviet authorities supported the Azerbaidzhan independence movement there as a means of exacting concessions from the Iranian government.[3] Nor is there evidence to indicate that in their long relationship with Egypt and other Arab clients in the 1950s and 1960s Soviet leaders approved of employing Soviet Muslim cadre--again, for other than symbolic reasons--who would have a more natural rapport with the Muslim Egyptians. According to one report, Khrushchev summarily

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[2] These policies are more fully explained in Dmitry Ponomareff and Susan Curran, Managing the Ethnic Factor in Russian and Soviet Armed Forces: An Historic Overview, R-2640/1, Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation (forthcoming).

[3] S. Enders Wimbush, "Divided Azerbaijan: Nation Building, Assimilation and Mobilization Between Three States," in William O. McCagg, Jr. and Brian D. Silver (eds.), Soviet Asian Ethnic Frontiers, New York: Pergamon Press, 1979, pp. 69-70.

rejected a request by President Nasser of Egypt to send Soviet Muslim pilots to fight there.[4] In a more recent example of Soviet sensitivity to the potential infection of Central Asian Muslims by outside sources, Soviet leaders rejected requests by Libya's Colonial Khadafi--and, it is rumored, by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini--to establish a diplomatic mission in Tashkent.[5]

Beginning in 1978, Soviet leaders apparently modified their reluctance to use Soviet Central Asians as part of a political-military strategy.

In fact, the Soviet Central Asian penetration of Afghanistan began sometime before Soviet troops crossed the border. Following Nur Mohammad Taraki's ascent to power with Soviet assistance in April 1978 a considerable number of non-military Soviet Central Asians were sent to Afghanistan--as interpreters and technicians--to service the new round of USSR-Afghanistan contracts initiated at that time. In addition, Soviet Central Asians moved into critical sectors of the Afghanistan bureaucracy, the universities and institutes, and into other positions where they could deal with key political, social, economic, and cultural issues in Afghan society, including the development of nationality policy.[6] This influx of Soviet Central Asians as bureaucratic cadre

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[4] Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Middle East & North Africa, November 17, 1976 (Annex), p. 4.

[5] Ronald Tyler, "Muslims of the Soviet Union: Why the Kremlin is Worried," Arab Report, June 20, 1979, p. 6.

[6] This information is based on first-hand accounts by specialists with expert knowledge of Central Asia. For example, see Eden Naby, "The Ethnic Factor in Soviet-Afghan Relations," Asian Survey, Vol. XX, No. 3, March 1980, pp. 249-252, and M. Mobin Shorish, "Soviet Central Asians in Afghanistan Affairs Since the April 1978 Coup," paper presented to the seminar on Soviet Nationality Problems, Columbia University, New York, November 14, 1978, p. 4.

peaked in November 1979 with the appointment of a member of a Soviet Muslim nationality (a Tatar, Fikrat A. Tabeev) as Soviet Ambassador to Afghanistan.

Despite this documented involvement of a select and trusted group of Soviet Central Asian non-military experts, we have no evidence to suggest that Soviet Central Asians in Afghanistan were engaged in military operations prior to the 1979 invasion. Moreover, according to a specialist who recently returned from Soviet Central Asia, Soviet Central Asians perceive themselves to have had no military involvement in Afghanistan before December 1979.[7]

According to eyewitness accounts, Soviet Central Asians clearly were part of the initial Soviet invasion force, although reports of their numbers relative to Soviet troops of other nationalities and their military duties once inside Afghanistan differ widely. For example, one report has it that "90 percent of the Soviet invading force is made up of recruits from Soviet Central Asia, who are not strikingly different from the Afghani in appearance and presumably should be able to establish some kind of empathy with them. The rest are White European Russians."[8] In January 1980, the Los Angeles Times supported this view but also disagreed with it in the same issue, printing on facing pages reports by the Associated Press' Barry Shlachter--claiming that "many of the troops come from Soviet Central Asia and are able to communicate in Uzbeki or Tadzhik, languages spoken in Afghanistan"--and the Times' own Oswald Johnston, noting that while many of the troops in

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[7] See Naby, p. 251.
[8] U.S. News and World Report, January 21, 1980, p. 20.

Afghanistan came from the Turkestan and Central Asian Military Districts, they were, according to Soviet stationing policy, mostly Soviet Europeans.[9] The German weekly Der Spiegel unequivocally supported the latter view: "Only the southern border republics of the Soviet Union were not represented among Soviet forces."[10] This was so, asserted Der Spiegel, because Moscow leaders feared that the Soviet Central Asians would fraternize with ethnically related Afghans. But according to Craig Whitney of the New York Times, Soviet Central Asians both constituted a sizable part of the invasion force and engaged in fraternization.[11] J. Dorsey of the Christian Science Monitor attempted to add some statistical precision to this confusion, quoting Western diplomats that 40 percent of the invading forces originated in Tadzhikistan, 25 percent in Uzbekistan, 25 percent in Turkmenistan, and 10 percent in European Russia.[12] Dorsey did not specify, however, whether these figures represent the percentage of military units from these republics or the percentage of troops of these nationalities within the units. If he meant the latter, he neglected to inform us how his diplomatic informants distinguished between ethnic groups who are racially similar.

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[9] Barry Shlachter, "Soviet Troops in Kabul Meet Anger--and Resignation," Los Angeles Times, January 8, 1980, p. 6; Oswald Johnston, "85,000 Soviet Soldiers Reported in Afghanistan," Ibid., p. 7.

[10] "Allah wird sie vernichten," Der Spiegel, January 14, 1980, p. 109.

[11] Craig Whitney, "In Soviet Asia, Afghan Thrust Finds Acceptance," New York Times, April 11, 1980, p. A-1.

[12] J. Dorsey, "Soviets Crush Afghanistan Rebel Resistance," Christian Science Monitor, January 10, 1980, p. 1.

III. CURRENT RAND RESEARCH

Current Rand research examining the impact of the ethnic factor on Soviet military policies may help clarify these issues and others. This research relies primarily on in-depth interviews with former Soviet servicemen, most of whom served in some branch of the Soviet military within the past ten years. Our analysis pays particular attention to territorial, branch, and functional stationing patterns for non-Russian soldiers. Thus, we are able to address with some confidence the nature of Soviet Central Asian military participation in Afghanistan based on our understanding, derived from interviews of current Soviet military policy and practices. Results of our research that bear on the question of Soviet Central Asian soldiers in Afgfhanistan may be summarized as follows. Except where noted, our interviewees unanimously identified these practices.

- The overwhelming majority of Soviet Central Asians who serve in the Soviet armed forces are carefully and purposely segregated into non-combat construction units; those few who are conscripted to combat units usually serve in support roles.
- Soviet Central Asians who serve in construction units receive only the most rudimentary military training, usually no more than one or two hours of rifle training, and often no individual or unit military training whatsoever.
- Elite military units such as the Strategic Rocket Forces, the Air Force, and to a lesser extent the Soviet Navy are drawn

almost exclusively from the Slavic population, and of this population mostly from Russians.

- Internal Security Forces (MVD) are composed of a large number, probably an overall majority, of Soviet Central Asians who do receive extensive military training. (Although unanimous in this view, fewer interviewees had knowledge of the MVD.)
- By design, the Soviet military currently has no national military combat units in which the majority would be recruited from one or several related ethnic groups.
- With the exception of construction units, stationing generally is based on the principle of extraterritoriality; that is, of stationing non-Russians in national regions of the USSR other than their own.

Our research indicates that the large majority of Soviet Central Asians serve in non-combat construction battalions, and only a very few in combat units.[1] To illustrate, construction battalions (each service has its own construction battalions with the Ground Forces possessing the most) routinely contain Central Asian and Caucasian soldiers, up to 80 to 90 percent. An average Soviet Ground Forces combat unit will contain up to 20 percent non-Slavs from all parts of the USSR of whom less than 10 percent are likely to be Central Asians.

[1] According to our findings, Soviet authorities privately justify this segregation for a number of reasons, including the relatively low educational level of Central Asians compared with Russians despite an equivalent number of years of formal schooling, marginal ability and unwillingness by Central Asians to use the Russian language, frequent instances of conflict--often violent--between Central Asian soldiers and others (especially Russians), and, as noted, the question of loyalty of Central Asian troops.

In addition, our research indicates that Soviet Central Asians serving in any capacity in the Soviet armed forces (with exceptions noted below) are unlikely to have received sufficient military training to qualify them for a combat role in Afghanistan. Soviet Central Asians who serve in combat units usually are confined to support duties, such as working in kitchens, warehouses, and barracks. If they receive regular combat training, the extent to which they are meant to be integrated into normal combat procedures is unclear from our research, but there is a strong suggestion that they are meant to be excluded from normal military operations. Central Asians who serve in construction battalions for the most part receive only marginal military training--sometimes only a few hours with a rifle and in many cases no military training at all.

Nearly all of the Soviet divisions identified in Afghanistan originated from the Central Asian and Turkestan Military Districts.[2] Of these, only a few probably were combat ready (category I), while the others relied upon a last-minute call-up of reserves from the local population to bring them to complement. Thus, the units containing Central Asians sent to Afghanistan were of two types: combat units of low-readiness divisions and available construction units. In both cases, it is doubtful that the soldiers in these units had received at any time during their obligatory terms of service more than marginal weapons and combat training. Because of this, we believe that neither the recently filled out combat units with extraordinary concentrations

[2] Colonel Jerome J. Haggerty, "Afghanistan--The Great Game," Military Review, August 1980, pp. 39-40.

of Central Asians nor the construction units were intended for combat in Afghanistan except incidentally. Combat units from these low-readiness divisions probably were intended to perform occupation duties. Construction and support units, by their very nature, are not intended for combat service.

Reports concerning the timing of the reserve call-up vary from several hours to several weeks. In any case, it is unlikely that Soviet Central Asian reservists received fundamental or much additional weapons and combat training, a notable omission from their training during obligatory service, due to time constraints. Underlining this deduction is the rapid withdrawal of Central Asian troops from Afghanistan within a few months of their arrival and their replacement with other, primarily Slavic, troops. Other Central Asian reservists were recalled to service but never mobilized. Many were sent to holding camps along the Soviet-Afghanistan border until late February 1980, when they were deactivated without having seen active duty. It is unclear whether these Central Asian reservists received military training in the holding camps, but many were not issued uniforms, which suggests that they did not.[3]

Some units of the Air Force and the Strategic Rocket Forces have been identified in Afghanistan. These branches of the military draw personnel almost exclusively from the Slavic, primarily Russian population. According to our interviewees, one interesting exception to recruitment policies to elite military services is the airborne forces.

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[3] "KARl MArx, Lenin = KARMAL", Der Speigel, June 16, 1980, pp. 112-114.

Airborne units can contain Central Asians who are Party members and possess unblemished political and security credentials. As airborne soldiers, Central Asians receive weapons and combat training and can serve in any capacity from unit interpreter to weapons specialist. While it is possible, even likely, that Central Asians served in Afghanistan with airborne units, it is unlikely that they could be found in large numbers or sizable concentrations in these units.

The Soviet military as a matter of policy abolished national military units in the late 1950s (and even a republic's constitutional right to field them in 1978); therefore, large concentrations of Soviet Central Asian soldiers in Afghanistan cannot be explained this way. One possible exception to this rule exists: A high percentage of Soviet MVD troops, probably a majority, are Central Asians who receive fundamental, even extensive weapons and, probably, combat training. Soviet leaders may have contingency plans for fielding moderate-sized "national units" of MVD troops for special assignments. (For example, Kazakh troops of the MVD--who are chosen for their antipathy to Russians--put down the 1972 Novocherkask bread riots.) Trained Central Asian MVD troops probably were, and perhaps continue to be, used in Afghanistan to guard military installations and government buildings and to escort convoys, tasks which are consonant with MVD functions.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The support role and occupation duties of Soviet Central Asian soldiers in Afghanistan often positioned them in highly visible locations, such as unloading supply aircraft at the Kabul airport and building barracks and officers' quarters, where foreign observers and especially journalists chanced to see them in sizable concentrations. Convoy and guard troops of the MVD--again, mostly Central Asians--also were highly visible. (It should be noted that the visual identification of Soviet Central Asian soldiers by foreign journalists is in itself highly suspect. It is conceivable that some of the "Central Asians" identified by Western journalistic sources were in fact Volga Tatars or Mordvinians who can be racially similar to Central Asians and who for some centuries have been accepted as equal in the Russian military establishment to Slavic troops. Moreover, we are inclined to suspect the ability of untrained journalists to distinguish between dark-skinned Central Asians and dark-skinned peoples from the Caucasus, especially Armenians, Georgians, and Azeri Turks.) From these encounters, journalists concluded that Soviet Central Asians participated fully in the Soviet invasion force. In fact, Soviet Central Asians conceivably did participate where they were observed; that is, in areas where their construction, support, occupation, convoy, and guard functions would logically take them. But it is unlikely for the reasons noted above

that sizable concentrations of Central Asians could be found on the front line.[1]

Soviet authorities probably sent Central Asians into Afghanistan for three reasons. First, Central Asians constitute perhaps the only readily available construction and support resource for building a logistic base of operations in Afghanistan. Second, Slavic troops were not readily available to fill out the incomplete divisions stationed in the Central Asian and Turkestan Military Districts. Third, and most important, for public relations reasons, it was expected that Soviet Central Asians probably would blunt the political impact of the violent attack on the Afghan population by their ability to fraternize with various parts of it. When Soviet Central Asian soldiers began to be withdrawn from Afghanistan in late February and early March 1980, it may have been in part because this initial logistic and support function had been largely completed.

Certainly this is one explanation, but it is clear from eyewitness reports and especially from reports by those eyewitnesses who speak the local languages of Afghanistan that Soviet Central Asian soldiers fraternized with the Afghan population, and that this fraternization was wide-ranging enough to make Soviet authorities uncomfortable lest Soviet Central Asians become infected with pro-Afghan, Islamic, nationalist, or anti-Russian sympathies. Consequently, most Soviet Central Asian

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[1] Several eyewitnesses to the first weeks of the Soviet invasion have noted in private conversations with the authors that they neither saw nor heard of any Central Asians engaged in front-line combat.

soldiers have been removed; others, as noted earlier, were gathered together but never sent to Afghanistan. Those few who remain are logically from the MVD, serving in various security functions. This was observed to be the case in Czechoslovakia in 1968 after most Soviet troops were withdrawn.

From the perspective of a Soviet political or military leader, the use of Soviet Central Asians as soldiers in Afghanistan probably backfired as a public relations strategy. For example, some recent information from Soviet Central Asia indicates that the use of Soviet Central Asians in the Afghanistan invasion has caused a new awareness among Soviet Central Asians generally about their relationship to the populations across their border, and in particular, to the world of Islám. For the most part, non-military Central Asians sent to Afghanistan to staff bureaucracies, like Central Asian soldiers, have been removed and replaced by Slavs, suggesting that they, too, may have developed unacceptable attachments to the Afghan population. Thus, it would appear that the Soviet experiment with Central Asians in Afghanistan was, at best, plagued by serious problems that caused its termination. At worst, the experiment simply failed.

Soviet leaders undoubtedly will learn many lessons from this experience, including the difficulties they are likely to encounter if they are required once again to mobilize incomplete divisions that must be brought to complement from local, non-Slavic reservists. Increasingly, as the pool of available conscripts--and, hence, future reservists--becomes more and more non-Russian and non-Slav, this issue

will come to play a major role in mobilization decisions. For this and other reasons, Soviet reserve mobilization requires considerably more research and analysis by Western specialists.

Beyond this, the problems surrounding the use of Central Asian military and non-military personnel in Afghanistan probably will convince Soviet leaders to reassess their eagerness and willingness to use Soviet Central Asians in this way in the future. Moreover, such a reassessment is likely to ensure that the long-standing historical doubts about the reliability of Central Asian participation in the Soviet armed forces will resurface and be strengthened.